

House Republican Press Release

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2006 Transportation Bill: Accelerating Completion of Long-Awaited Projects



Like most Greenwich residents, we have been growing impatient with the glacial progress that has been made toward completion of transportation projects intended to ease traffic congestion in Fairfield County.

However, this year's transportation act, known as "The Roadmap for Connecticut's Economic Future," may turn out to be the long-awaited breakthrough.

The legislation extends to the entire state the remedies for southwest and southeast Connecticut's transportation problems that were developed in last year's transportation bill.

Initiatives include highway projects that will move traffic more efficiently and safely, commuter rail projects that will take more cars off the highways, and projects involving regional, statewide and interstate coordination and cooperation to enhance commuter and freight mobility throughout the region.

Perhaps most importantly, the bill puts in place two major changes we believe will speed up the pace of construction on transportation projects in Fairfield County and encourage significantly more commuters to use Metro North.

The legislation moves the Transportation Strategy Board (TSB), which develops and updates the state's transportation strategy and prioritizes transportation projects, from the Department of Transportation (DOT) to the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) and authorizes the State Bond Commission to issue up to \$1.3 billion in bonding that would be secured through future federal transportation grants.

OPM is focused on implementing policies and getting results – and can be expected to take the same approach with the transportation strategies formulated by the TSB.

OPM will cut through bureaucratic red tape and demand results, whereas the DOT, which has traditionally been preoccupied with constructing, repairing and improving our state highways, roads and bridges, follows rigid procedural guidelines that can delay important projects for months or even years.

By authorizing the bond commission to issue \$1.3 billion in bonding in anticipation of federal grant money, which is in addition to the \$1 billion in new Special Tax Obligation (STO) bonding, the legislation makes more funding available earlier, which means the state can move more quickly on priority projects such as purchasing more commuter rail cars; constructing or expanding stations in Stamford, Bridgeport, and New Haven to

accommodate rail service and at least one other mode of transportation; making improvements to Long Island Sound to facilitate its use for passenger and freight movement; and expanding the Bridgeport Inter-modal Facility to support high speed ferry service.

In addition, the act requires the TSB, when developing and revising the state's transportation strategy, to consider reducing congestion by encouraging greenway initiatives, safe-routes-to-school programs, and rideshare programs, which would benefit our community. Greenwich currently has at least four safe routes to school programs in operation and could easily have them for every school. The provision ensures that the town can apply for funding to implement these programs.

This legislation takes a broader approach to Connecticut's transportation problems and needs than has been the case in the past. It requires the OPM secretary to consult with the transportation, economic and community development, and environmental protection commissioners to ensure the coordination of state and regional transportation planning with other state planning, including economic development plans.

It also requires Connecticut, acting through the Governor, to initiate formal discussions with Massachusetts, New York and Rhode Island regarding opportunities to enhance regional commuter and freight mobility.

Connecticut is not a separate transportation entity. Vehicles traveling between Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York generally use the I-95 corridor that connects the states.

The act recognizes that New England is a region and traffic flowing through the states that comprise it should be coordinated on a regional basis.

The long term intent of the act is to reduce traffic congestion, improve interstate transportation, and reduce urban sprawl.

Its overall effect should be to stimulate economic growth, improve the business climate, and create more jobs for the people of Connecticut.